

# Illusions of Grandeur – Matchmaker Style

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Rated: PG-13

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Summary: Sixth in the Matchmaker Style series. Lois and Clark are married and working as a team to discover who is kidnapping the youngsters of wealthy people.

Story Size: 22,716 words (121Kb as text)

This is a sequel to [Witness — Matchmaker Style](#)

Disclaimers: The characters in this story are property of DC, December 3<sup>rd</sup> productions and Warner Bros. No Copyright infringement is intended. I have just borrowed the characters for a short time.

My thanks go out to my betas — Artemis and Ray for their help.

In this particular story a lot of the dialogue is taken from the script text. I wish to express my thanks to my Beta readers Artemis and Ray Reynolds for their invaluable help. This was a VERY rough draft when it first landed in their hands.

\* \* denotes emphasis

< > denotes thoughts

As always comments are welcome. (ken.janney@kjanney.com)

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## Chapter 1

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Universal Locator Designation

Alpha -34 x Gamma 255 x Tau -225

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Early on Sunday morning, Clark had heard an emergency call for Superman from Milwaukee over the radio. They were both up and Clark had just finished making breakfast. He ate his breakfast at super speed and Lois told him that she wanted to catch the Sunday morning talk shows, had some correspondence to catch up on and that he could stick around after the incident to hold a press conference if he felt there was a need. He gave her a kiss and spinning into his Suit moved through the bedroom to the balcony and left.

He had made it to Milwaukee in time to prevent it from becoming a major incident. All in all it had been a trying week and he was feeling a little run-down. There hadn't been any reporters at the incident, so he had seized the opportunity to rest and recharge. He was flying in a reclining position, fingers laced and hands behind his head as if he were on a sofa simply soaking up the sun's rays as he coasted along in the direction of Metropolis. He was below the air traffic lanes so that he wouldn't present an obstacle. He was so relaxed that he had even closed his eyes.

He was replaying the events of the last few months in his mind. The events in Smallville with Trask and how Lois had saved his life when Trask was trying to shoot him brought a smile to his face. The sudden change in their relationship, jumping

directly from business colleagues, although he was already in love with his partner, to both of them being in love with each other and ... married! (GGGoH — Matchmaker Style, link in the FDK)

The pleased smile turned into one of great pleasure as he recalled the pheromone incident and how it had affected Lois. The time on the island satisfying her needs had been a labor of love ... literally. (PML — Matchmaker Style, link in the FDK)

His smile changed again as he thought about when they finally had a chance to have a honeymoon and it was interrupted by their discovery of Congressman Harrington accepting a bribe for information about a military device test and the tsunami that he's had to battle. (HiM — Matchmaker Style, link in the FDK)

It hadn't been long after that he'd had his biggest challenge to date, a seventeen mile wide asteroid. He was happy that Lois had been able to help him recover his memory. He smiled once again at the technique she had used to help him recover his memory of being Clark, bedroom therapy. The act of joining their bodies had brought Clark back in a flood. Then when she recounted all of the times that Superman had saved her it had gradually brought Superman back. (ASU — Matchmaker Style, link in the FDK)

His smile turned to a frown at the memory of their most recent adventure. Lois's life had been endangered because, of all things, Superman had to speak to a bunch of sixth-graders at a career day function. He would really have to reconsider those kinds of activities. It wasn't like any of those kids could aspire to a career as a superhero. That event had taken him away when she had really needed him. (Witness — Matchmaker Style, link in the FDK)

He was startled out of his reverie when he had the impression that he was in the middle of a busy highway. The sudden honking of horns brought him to a halt in mid-air. His hands came out from behind his head and he looked around. As he did a black and white object passed. His first thought was of a police car, but then the realization hit that this police car had a pair of wings. Looking around he saw more such marked beasts and realized that he was in the middle of a flock of Canadian geese which accounted for the honking he had heard.

Dropping a couple of hundred feet to get out of their way he muttered to himself, "So much for a nice Sunday flight." Then he thought about it and said to himself, "I'd rather have Lois with me anyhow and I bet she'd love a flight." So thinking he put on a burst of speed and cut the air in the direction of their apartment. He landed on the balcony and entered the bedroom.

Lois heard him and started to move in the direction of the bedroom. Once she stepped in he took in her apparel and said, "Grab a sweater. I want to take you flying."

Lois smiled in anticipation and ran into the closet to fetch the garment. They exited and closed the French doors. Once they were on the balcony he picked her up and they took off.

Once they were airborne she turned to him and said, "This is one of my favorite perks of being married to Superman. I get to go flying with him whenever I want." She kissed the side of his neck. "Where are we going?"

He smiled an enigmatic smile and said, "I thought I'd introduce you to some friends."

"Oh, who?"

"You'll see. Ah, there they are. Just up ahead."

Lois looked, "All I see is a flock of geese."

"Yep."

"They're your friends?"

"Let's just say that they are more like a passing acquaintance," and laughed and told her the story.

Lois was still laughing as turning in mid-air he set a south-westerly course and within minutes they were over Smallville.

Recognizing just where they were, Lois said, "Oh, Clark, we can't visit your parents. I look a mess."

“No you don’t and even if you did, they wouldn’t care. They don’t love you for how you look; they love you for who you are.”

They landed in the front yard and Clark spun into his jeans and sweat shirt as they walked up to the door.

Before they were even able to knock the door opened and Martha was standing there arms open to receive Lois into a motherly hug.

Clark said, quietly, “See what I mean?”

Lois smiled and stepped into the hug which she returned with as much fervor as it was delivered. Lois reveled in the feeling of unconditional love that she received from both of Clark’s parents. They didn’t judge her for how she had been when they first laid eyes on her. She still quailed at the thought of the gaffs she had made at that first meeting, saying that she thought that Jonathan could be a cross dresser of all things. She tightened her hug slightly at that thought.

Over Lois’s shoulder, Martha said to Clark, “Your dad is in the barn. Why don’t you go see if there’s anything he needs?”

Clark nodded his understanding and turned away. It was apparent that Martha wanted some time alone with Lois. It had all happened so quickly, she was still trying to get to know her daughter-in-law and enjoying doing it. Martha had learned a lot about Lois a few weeks ago when Clark had lost his memory. When his parents had arrived, he and Lois had been engaged in the bedroom therapy that had brought back his Clark memories. They had seen the results of that and understood just how deeply Lois loved him.

Clark jogged to the barn and entering called out, “Dad?”

From under the tractor he heard, “Over here.”

Bending down and looking under the tractor he asked, “Anything I can help you with?”

Jonathan smiled and said, “Yeah, this nut is stripped. I can’t get a good bite on it with the wrench. Think you can get it off?”

Clark crawled under the tractor and reaching up, grasped the offending nut and pinching it with his fingers removed it from its bolt.

“Thanks, son. Now I can replace it with a new nut.”

Clark supersped to the work bench, retrieved the nut, returned to his position under the tractor and put it on the bolt before Jonathan had a chance to even move.

Once that was done he helped Jonathan out from under the tractor.

Jonathan started wiping his greasy hands on a rag that he pulled out of his back pocket. As he did he asked, “What brought you out here?”

“I was just taking Lois for a joy flight and thought we’d stop in and see what’s cookin’.”

“Well, we had breakfast a while ago. I think your mother could be making lunch.”

“That’s great! Maybe she can give Lois a cooking lesson while she’s at it.”

“Is Lois serious about learning to cook?”

“Yep! I’ve been teaching her. We haven’t done anything complicated yet, but we’re taking our time. She decided that it was fun to work together in the kitchen and she really doesn’t mind me teaching her. In fact, don’t tell her I said this, she’s the first one in the kitchen and almost literally tapping her foot in impatience if I take too long getting there to start making dinner.”

Jonathan put his arm across Clark’s shoulder and said, “I won’t say a word. What do you say to going in and seeing what \*is\* cooking and finding out how soon we will be eating?”

When the two men of the family entered the kitchen through the back door they found the two women of the family busy, side by side, working at the stove, chatting animatedly and laughing together.

Hearing this, Clark became concerned. <What stories is Mom telling Lois?>

Martha said, over her shoulder, “Have a seat, boys, lunch will be served in a couple of minutes.”

Lois left her position at the stove and started setting the table and as she did she gave Clark a conspiratorial wink in reply to which Clark smiled. Apparently Lois had been having a good time with his mom, her mother-in-law.

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Back in Metropolis, on a large walled estate, two young boys had just come out of the mansion into the early fall sunshine. They were laughing and joking as they descended the steps to the lawn. When they reach the bottom, one of the boys, Nick a skinny boy with long straight brown hair shouted, “Race you to the tree!” and took off running.

Chris, a slightly heavier lad with curly light brown hair and glasses reacted quickly, but not quickly enough and try as he might, Nick got to the tree and tagged it a second before Chris.

Nick threw up his arms and started dancing around like a winning prize-fighter and shouted, “I’m faster than a speeding bullet!”

Chris shouted, “No way!”

Both boys were out of breath from the run and collapsed to the ground.

Nick relented, “Okay. But I’m faster than \*you\*. And stronger too.”

Again Chris rebutted, “No way!” and tackled Nick. The two boys, apparently best of friends were rolling around on the ground having a friendly wrestling match when something, out of place, caught their eyes.

There was awe in his tone as Chris asked, “What is it?”

Nick, being very practical asked, “How should I know?”

Their wrestling match completely forgotten the two boys got up and slowly approached the object.

It was a large box, like a steamer trunk, painted a shiny black with white moons and golden stars painted on it. Across the top there was a line of text in gold.

Chris read, “Open the lid and step inside, and you’ll go on a magic ride.”

Nick suggested, “Maybe your dad sent it from his trip.”

With a look of wonder, Chris said, “Yeah, cool.”

Apparently the bravest of the two, Nick reached for the lid and opened the box. When the two boys peered inside all they saw was ... nothing. It was totally empty.

Seeing this apparently harmless empty box, Nick challenged, “You wanna get in? Or are you scared?”

Replying to this challenge with one of his own, Chris asked, “Aren’t you?”

Not one to refuse a challenge or admit to being scared, Nick replied, “No way.”

Suiting his actions to his words, Nick climbed over the side of the box and stood inside. He looked around, up and down and then voiced what was happening, in a disappointed tone, “Nothing’s happening.”

Chris suggested a possible solution, “Maybe you have to close it.”

Nick nodded his agreement, “Okay.” He ducked down as Chris closed the lid.

Chris stood there for some seconds watching, but nothing appeared to be happening. Eventually he asked Nick, “Do you feel anything?”

Thinking that Nick just couldn’t hear him when in the box, because Nick didn’t answer, Chris shouted, “Nick? Hey, Nick!”

When Nick still didn’t answer Chris threw back the lid of the box. To his total amazement Nick was nowhere to be seen. The box was as empty as when they first opened it. Chris looked around at the surrounding area walking all around the box looking for a back door that he just hadn’t seen. Not being able to find Nick, Chris finally became really scared and started running

for the safety of the house just as fast as his legs could carry him.

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Later, back in Metropolis, Lois and Clark were discussing their time in Smallville with his parents.

“Clark, I really love your mother. The more I get to know her, the more special I see that she is. I can see how you turned out the way you are. They have to be the best parents in the world.”

“I don’t think I need to tell you that they think a lot of you too. Dad loves you like a daughter, the daughter that they never had before. They have always told me that I was an answer to their prayers for a child, well, you are the answer to their desire for a daughter.”

“I’m glad that things have worked out this way. I’d hate it if they didn’t like me or if they were like my parents. I couldn’t bear that. I’m glad we can visit them on the spur of the moment that way. We couldn’t do that with my family.”

“You want to know a secret?”

“You know I always do.”

“When Mom called us when we were at the Lexor, she wasn’t calling me. She wanted to talk to her favorite daughter.”

Clark didn’t need his super vision to detect the tear that formed at the corner of Lois’s eye and he was sure that it wasn’t a tear of sadness either.

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## Chapter 2

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Clark awoke a few seconds before the alarm was set to go off. He and Lois were spooned in the bed and he gently, so as not to wake her prematurely, pulled Lois back against his body. Once he had her where he wanted her he started kissing the back and side of her neck. After the second gentle caress she let out a contented sigh and whispered, “Mmmmmmmmm, now, that’s the way to wake up in the morning. No raucous alarm, gentle kisses. How did I ever live before you came into my life? I’ll tell you, I didn’t live. I existed. This is living.” She rolled over so that she was facing him and started a real kiss just before the alarm started to sound, interrupting them.

She let out a frustrated, “Drat that machine! It must be time to get up.”

“I guess so.” He got up and strolled to the bathroom doing his morning stretch. He knew that they had an early story meeting so he didn’t tease Lois by disrobing in front of her. A few seconds after the door closed behind him he came out showered, shaved and dressed for the day. He said, “Your turn.”

As she slipped out from under the covers, Lois quipped, “What took you so long?”

In a deadpan fashion, he replied, “I had to trim my nails.”

“Really?”

“Really. Hurry up and get dressed, Perry called for an early story meeting this morning. I’m going to go start breakfast.”

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The Daily Planet staff was starting to gather for the story meeting. Lois and Clark sat next to each other with their travel mugs on the table in front of them as other members of the staff drifted in, in ones and twos.

As he was heading to the meeting, Jimmy heard the chime of the wire-service machine signaling a new article. He changed direction and stopped at the machine. As he read the story he started to get excited. Smiling, he ripped the story from the roll and almost literally ran to the conference room.

Perry entered just before him and as Perry was looking around, counting noses, Jimmy burst in and shouted, “Chief, I’ve got a good one!”

Perry shook his head and said, “Now son, I told you you’d get an assignment when the time is right.”

Jimmy started to pitch the story like an infomercial ad-man, “The Queen of England, in the middle of a State dinner, walks

out into the garden and starts dancing in a fountain with one of her Beefeeders. My angle: ‘A Royal Cry for Help.’”

With a look of disgust, Perry replied, “Come on, Olsen. This is a newspaper, not a check-out rag. The Queen’s peccadilloes after a few too many port Sherries is not my idea of a ‘good one.’”

With a dejected air, Jimmy withdrew and said, “Yes, sir.”

Perry turned to the rest of the staff, his head count all but forgotten, and asked, “Now, how’re the real stories coming?”

Clark was probably the second closest to Jimmy of all of the staff, the closest being Perry and his heart ached for Jimmy and they way Perry had shot his idea down. As he was taking a sip from his travel mug, Jimmy slumped into a chair.

While Clark was watching Jimmy, Lois brought Perry up to date on their story.

“There are still no leads on those kidnappings. The children of seven wealthy families have been taken in the last three months. All of them were returned safely after huge ransoms were paid, but none of the kids remember anything about what happened to them.”

Clark added, “Lois and I tried to interview the parents but we’re talking very high profile here. CEO’s, rock stars, politicians, no one wants the publicity because their kids are involved.”

Perry was taking it all in as Lois and then Clark spoke and then replied with a shake of the head, “I can understand that but we need a good story. How many more times can we say there’s no new information?”

Suddenly the entire staff was distracted by the entry of Catherine Grant. Cat’s usual attire could stop traffic, but what she was wearing had an equal effect on the staff. In place of her normal tight, very tight, almost spandex tight, short, short skirts with slits and peek-a-boob openings, she was wearing a very conservative, and not, Cat conservative, Lois conservative, business suit. It was beige in color and consisted of pants with a jacket over and the jacket was buttoned up all the way to her neck. To top everything off she was wearing white dinner gloves. Her hair was done up in a top do and she was wearing glasses. To say that her appearance was a surprise would be to utter an understatement.

As she entered, she started peeling off her gloves and as she selected a banana from the fruit bowl said, “Sorry I’m late.”

Lois, ever one to needle Cat quipped, “Yeah, Halloween was a month ago.”

Perry decided to take the high road and asked, “Did someone ... pass on?”

As Cat dropped into one of the empty chairs across from Lois and Clark she started peeling her banana and asked, “Can’t a girl get dressed up without sending out a press release?”

Recently, Clark had been seeing the softer side of Cat and thought that she was trying to change some things. He decided to encourage her, “I think you look very nice.”

Giving Lois a smug look, Cat said, “Thank you, Clark.”

From the side, Jimmy quipped, “Kinda like a librarian fantasy I had once ...”

Lois made one of her leaps of logic and challenged, “Okay. Who is he? You never do anything this drastic unless there’s a man involved.”

Actually happy that Lois had guessed what she was doing, Cat proudly proclaimed, “As a matter of fact, I happen to be having lunch with Arthur Chow this afternoon.”

Jimmy was startled and said in an awed tone, “Whoa. He’s even richer than Lex Luthor, isn’t he?”

Cat sprawled back in her chair as if it were a throne as she said, “Second richest man in the world. We’re on the same charity committee together and we’re going over some last minute details for tomorrow night’s ‘Magic of the Night’ ball

which I hope you're all planning to attend." As she said this last she looked significantly around the room.

Thoughtfully, Clark asked, "Arthur Chow. Isn't he a little ... conservative for you?"

Cat smiled and said, "He and I have a lot in common."

In reply, Lois quipped, "You mean those little green pieces of paper with dead presidents on them?"

Cat stifled a laugh as she said, "Ex ... actly!"

Perry was finally catching on and asked, "Now wait a second. You're going to bamboozle this guy into thinking you're a straight arrow?"

With a sly look she replied, "That's my plan."

At her confirmation, Perry started to smile and said, "Heaven help him." He looked around and said, "Now, who's up next? Biederman, how about that piece you were doing on Attention Deficit Disorder? Sounds like a real nineties disease. Biederman? You listening?" Clark started to snicker because it looked to him as though Biederman was giving an imitation of the disorder he was supposed to be writing about.

Suddenly, Clark's super-hearing picked up the sound of a woman softly crying. Looking around he found the source, a woman sitting at his desk. Instinctively, Clark stood and started to move in her direction.

Seeing Clark's movement, Lois grabbed their coffee mugs and rose to follow him.

The woman appeared to be in her late thirties and pleasant looking, though not a beauty. What she was wearing caught Lois's eye. It appeared to be something along the lines of a maid's uniform, not a 'French' upstairs maid uniform which was the subject of so many men's fantasies to be sure, a modest utilitarian uniform.

Clark approached her with Lois close behind. He knelt next to the woman and asked, "Can I help you?"

Startled at his approach, she asked, "Clark Kent?"

Clark replied, "Yes, I'm Clark Kent," turning to indicate Lois he continued, "and this is Lois Lane, my partner."

Introducing herself, she said, "My name is Rose Collins. I need you to write a story."

Reaching past Clark, Lois grabbed a tissue and offered it to Rose.

As Rose wiped her eyes, Clark asked, "Is there something wrong?"

She sniffled and said, "It's Nicky, my little boy. Someone's made a terrible mistake."

Lois's intuition was making one of its famous leaps, seeing the uniform told Lois that this woman worked for someone wealthy. She said a mistake had been made. This had to have something to do with the story they were working on. Her curiosity had been aroused and she asked, "What kind of mistake?"

Rose looked at Lois and asked a question, "You've both been writing about the kidnappings, haven't you?"

Lois smiled at this confirmation of her supposition as she replied, "Yes, we have."

Clark asked, "Has your son been kidnapped, Mrs. Collins?"

Already on the edge, emotionally, this blunt statement of the fact as a question pushed her over the edge and Rose started to cry as she nodded her agreement.

Seeing her reaction, Clark asked, "Shouldn't you be taking this to the police?"

A look of stark fear overtook her features as Rose shook her head and said, "I'm not supposed to tell them or Nicky will be ...". Her voice faltered and she couldn't complete the statement.

Clark attempted to comfort her by patting her shoulder as he said, "It's okay, it's okay."

Lois asked, "How can we help you?"

Rose wiped a tear and said, "I work for Mr. and Mrs. Mark

Moskal."

Lois nodded in understanding as she asked, "Mark Moskal the developer?" Lois felt somewhat smug at this confirmation of her supposition.

Rose nodded and said, "Yes."

Lois said, "He's practically built every other building in Metropolis."

Rose nodded in agreement and took up her story, "I take care of their house. Nicky and I live on the estate. He and their son Chris are both six and they always play together and ..." Again her voice failed her.

Clark voiced his surmise, "And the kidnapper took the wrong kid."

Rose finished her plea, "The note demands five million dollars by tomorrow night. The Moskals are en route from their safari but ... all that money ... how can I ask them? Could you write something? Tell the kidnapper he's made a mistake. Please. Help me." She finished with a tone of desperation in her voice.

Lois and Clark exchanged a look and Lois said, "We could write a story, but I don't know how much good it will do. Would it be possible for us to examine the scene of the crime?" Lois was hoping that Clark's super-senses would be able to pick up something.

After Rose said that she would take them to the house, Clark told Perry that they were heading out to follow-up on a lead for their story.

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Lois and Clark were in the Jeep following Rose as she drove her aging sedan to the 'house' as she called it. As they drove through the gate and got a glimpse of the mansion that sat in the middle of the grounds, Lois quipped, "So ... this is the other half that I've heard so much about. This place even puts Luthor's penthouse to shame."

After they parked, Rose led them to the back lawn and the area that the boys had been playing in. She went into the house to retrieve the note.

While they waited, Lois spotted some statuary and flippantly, picking up a small statue and waving it around said, "I'll bet this is worth enough that it could pay our rent for a few months."

Clark looked at it and replied, "More like buy a small home in the suburbs. It's a Remington bronze."

Quickly, but carefully Lois placed the statue back on the pedestal she had removed it from, being careful not to drop it.

She quickly stepped away lest she knock it over and stood close to Clark as they saw Rose coming toward them accompanied by a boy with curly hair and glasses.

Clark greeted him, "Hey, you must be, Chris."

Chris was almost literally holding onto Rose's skirt as evidence of how scared he was and he just nodded his agreement to Clark.

Looking down at Chris Rose reassured him, "It's okay. They're going to help us find Nicky."

Chris looked at Clark and said, "My daddy is coming home and he'll take care of it."

Trying to win him over, Clark said, "I know he will. But until he comes back we're going to see what we can do."

Rose handed the note to Lois and she read it aloud, "I have your son. If you want to see him alive again, bring five million dollars to Hobs River Carnival at midnight tomorrow. Come alone. No authorities, or the boy will be ..." Lois just couldn't finish reading it so Clark used his supervision to finish reading it to himself.

Lois turned to Chris and asked, "You were with Nick when this happened?"

Chris nodded in response.

Seeing his nod, Lois asked, "Can you tell us what you saw?"

Chris started describing what he had seen, "It was a magic

box, with moons and stars.”

Lois looked at Rose for confirmation.

Rose said, “He has a pretty active imagination.”

Lois didn’t get that feel from Chris so she followed up, “What did it look like? What color was it?”

“Black and shiny. Nick got in and then he disappeared. That’s all.”

Clark conferred with Lois, “He sounds sincere, but he might be blocking out something, traumatic.”

Lois replied, “I think he believes that’s what he saw.”

Unexpectedly they were interrupted. “What’s going on here?”

Turning around they saw Mr. and Mrs. Moskal coming out of the house. Both look tired from long hours of travel and worried about the situation.

Mrs. Moskal, with a sound of relief in her voice cried, “Christopher!” and kneeling held out her arms. Chris ran to her and she enfolded him in her arms.

Mr. Moskal was distracted and put his hand on Chris’s head by way of greeting before turning to Rose and asking, “Rose, are you all right? Mary Frances and I were so worried.”

Standing, Mrs. Moskal moved over and demonstrated that there was more than an employer/employee relationship when she gave Rose a hug.

Mr. Moskal had been watching this and then turned his attention to Lois and Clark, “Who exactly are you?”

Clark replied, “We’re from the Daily Planet. Rose asked us ...”

Mr. Moskal cut him off saying, “The note said no authorities.”

Lois stepped in, “We haven’t told the police.”

Clark added, “Although I think we should. They can only help and ...”

Again, Mr. Moskal cut him off, “No, absolutely not.”

Rose pleaded with Lois and Clark, “Please, you promised.”

Convinced that his word would be final, Mr. Moskal said, “I intend to pay the ransom in full and get the boy back and if the two of you do anything to jeopardize the safety of ...”

Lois interrupted, “Believe me, Mr. Moskal, we want to see Nick back safe and sound.

Clark added, “But we also want to make sure this doesn’t keep happening to children all over Metropolis.”

Mr. Moskal was becoming angry that these ‘people’ were challenging his authority and it showed in his voice as he said, “That’s not my problem right now.”

Mrs. Moskal, trying to be the mediator said, “I think we could use some time alone right now. We’ll take care of Rose and Nick, but thank you for your concern.

Lois and Clark looked at Rose and saw that it would be a dead end to pursue the point so they turned to leave.

It was getting late so rather than return to the Planet they headed to the dojo for their weekly karate class.

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### Chapter 3

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The next day, when Lois and Clark returned to the newsroom Lois had immediately started making calls while Clark had started doing a computer search and some additional calls.

Clark could hear the frustration in Lois’s voice as she was wrapping up her latest call, “Yes, I understand. Thank you.”

As she hung up, Clark approached her desk and she asked, “Anything?”

Clark’s reply didn’t hold any promise at all, “Stymied.”

Lois vented her frustration by slamming her desk drawer closed and said, “I hate that word and I hate that feeling.”

Clark reported, “The police won’t discuss any of the other kidnappings and the other victim’s parents want to help but won’t go on the record.”

Lois summed up her feelings, “It’s like knowing there’s an answer behind a door but not being able to unlock it.”

Clark demonstrated just how well he knew his wife when he said, “Being out of the loop.”

Nodding, Lois said, “Drives me crazy.”

Trying to lighten the mood and also propose a different direction to attack the problem, Clark said, “I think this calls for a little magic.”

Lois looked at him warily and watched closely.

Clark slowly held up his hands, pulled up his sleeves and turned his hands around a couple of times as he said, “Observe, there is nothing up my sleeve except my arms.” He shifted to super-speed and pulled a card from his back pocket. Before the movement could even register on Lois’s retinas his hands were back before her and the card was in one of them making it look as if it had magically appeared from thin air. “Ta-da!”

Lois gave him a look and took the card. After reading it she said, “I am \*not\* going to Cat’s party.”

Realizing that Lois wasn’t seeing the connection, Clark said, “It’s for charity. Besides, it could be our only lead.”

Grumpily, Lois replied, “We don’t have a lead.”

In a more upbeat tone that Lois believed was warranted, Clark said, “Sure we do. Don’t you remember what Chris Moskal said? He saw a [i]magic[i] box. Maybe a magician’s involved.”

That didn’t help Lois’s grumpy mood any. She said, “That’s not a lead, that’s a desperate cry for help.”

Clark decided to play on Lois’s emotions, “Don’t you want to help Rose?”

Lois felt a little insulted at the insinuation and responded, “Yes, of course I do, but ...” Lois’s fears were warring with her reason. She had a fundamental fear of the unknown and magic was the realm of secrets. How could she explain this to Clark without seeming petty or afraid?

Clark challenged, “But what?”

His challenge went unanswered.

After work they went home to change.

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That night, as they exited the cab in front of the Magic Club Lois was wearing a lacy black creation which fit her curves like a second skin and had a deeply scooped neckline which revealed a lot of cleavage. The dress was of a medium length, below the knee, but was slit up the back to allow freedom of movement. She had chosen not to wear any necklace which allowed an unobstructed view of her creamy skin and her long and what Clark thought of as a very kissable, neck.

Clark was dressed in a tuxedo with an old fashioned wing collar and a black bow tie.

Just as Lois was turning around to finish a comment she had been making to Clark as they had finished their ride, Lois said, reluctantly, “I hate magic, that’s what.” She looked at Clark. When she did a magician behind her startled her into turning around when he threw up his hands which were covered with a red scarf and produced a live white pigeon which fluttered its wings in her face.

Startled, Lois let out a “Gaaaa!” and backed away a look of fear on her face. In turning away from the magician she had put her back to the clubhouse.

Clark was enjoying her discomfiture as she started backpeddling toward the building almost running into Cat in the process. He asked, “How can you hate magic?”

Regaining her composure somewhat, Lois put her hands on her hips and said, “This is above and beyond the call of duty.”

Cat had spotted Lois and Clark and snuck up behind Lois and said, “Abracadabra,” and was very pleased when Lois actually jumped.”

Rounding on her, Lois was ready to release a scathing tirade, but was stopped by Cat’s appearance. Cat was wearing a very

conservative white outfit with padded shoulders, a high neckline and sheath skirt that reached to mid calf. She had on white gloves, held a white clutch purse and had her hair done up in a bun.

Lois quipped, “Princess Di have a garage sale?”

Cat was literally so happy she was beside herself and let Lois’s barb pass. She said, “Arthur sent a limo for me. He’s introducing me to his \*mother\* tonight.” Just then the limo pulled up and Cat hastened toward it, she turned as she was about to enter and said, “Uh, Perry and Jimmy are already inside. Enjoy!” She gave a final wave and disappeared into the limo. Clark waved back as Lois turned away with a sour expression.

As the limo pulled away, Clark offered Lois his arm and asked, “Ready?”

Resigned to her fate, taking his arm, Lois asked a rhetorical question, “Do I have a choice?”

As they headed for the doorway another magician appeared, this one was holding a burning torch which he had been bringing to his mouth and swallowing the flames. This time, as Lois and Clark passed he appeared to grab the flames and throw them up into the air where they exploded like a fire cracker.

Lois shied away coming up hard against her husband’s body. Clark kept them walking while he chuckled.

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Inside the club, Perry and Jimmy were watching a demonstration of hypnosis. The operator had a young female subject sitting in a chair. She apparently was already under hypnosis because she had her eyes closed and the operator was giving her commands.

Perry said, “Aw, this is bunk. Let’s go back to the séance.”

Jimmy did his best to stop him, “No, wait. This is interesting.”

The placard read, ‘Dr. Andrew Novak — Hypnotist’

Dr. Novak addressed his subject, “Still relaxed, still listening to the sound of my voice. Now lift your right hand.”

The subject raised her right hand in response to the command.

Seeing the response, Dr. Novak commanded, “Higher.”

When she complied, he said, “Good. Whenever you hear me say the words ‘thank you’ you will raise your hand over your head like you just did. When I count down and snap my fingers, you will awake refreshed. Five, four, three, two, one.” After the count of ‘one’ he snapped his fingers and his subject opened her eyes and looked around.

Dr. Novak with a showman’s flair addressed the audience and said, “Let’s have a nice round of applause for the young lady. Thank you.”

As soon as he said, ‘Thank you.’ Right on cue, the young lady raised her hand in the same gesture she had while asleep. She was mystified at her own action and looked at Dr. Novak.

He smiled in response.

Jimmy nudged Perry and said, “See, it works.”

Perry waved the hand that was holding his drink and said, “Jimmy, don’t be naive. That woman was an obvious plant.”

Dr. Novak obviously overheard Perry’s comment because he said, “A skeptic, ladies and gentlemen. Perhaps you would do us the favor of being my next subject.”

The audience appreciated the audacious challenge and applauded.

Perry, embarrassed, said, “No, not me.”

Jimmy encouraged him, “Go ahead, Chief. Prove him wrong.”

Perry was very obviously a skeptic and shaking his head he moved to the front where the chair stood. As he was sitting down, Perry said, “Don’t be disappointed if nothing happens. I’m a very strong-willed individual.” Once he was seated comfortably, Perry reached down and placed his glass of wine on the floor beside the

chair. Bringing his hand back up he rested his forearms on the chair arms.

Dr. Novak removed an old fashioned gold pocket watch from his pocket and held it by the chain. Using his fingers to roll the chain he lowered the watch so that it was in Perry’s field of vision and caused it to twirl. Once Perry’s attention was centered on the twirling watch, Dr. Novak spoke in a monotone, “See the watch, only the watch. Hear my voice, only my voice. Breathe and relax, in and out. When I count to five you will close your eyes. One, two, three, four, five.”

Jimmy was actually surprised when in obedience to the command, Perry’s eyes actually closed.

Dr. Novak had also observed this action and said, “Excellent. The subject is now ready. All I need now is a post-hypnotic suggestion. Anybody?”

Smiling a mischievous smile, Jimmy raised his hand and said, “Yeah, I’ve got one.”

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Lois and Clark had opted to go to the main room, bypassing the séance, hypnotism demonstration and others. Upon entering, they did not immediately take seats at a table, but stood near the back and observed for a second until they were led to a table.

From the sound of Clark’s voice, Lois could tell that he was impressed by who they were going to be seeing. He said, “Look, it’s Darren Romick, the world’s greatest illusionist.”

Lois was unimpressed, but was curious, “Now, how did you know that?”

With a smile, he pointed at an entry in the program and said, “See, it says so, right here.”

Lois snorted and said, “Well, I’m not buying it,” then she went on as if stating the obvious, “Illusion, Clark, as in trick, as in phony.”

With some enthusiasm he countered, “Lois, he made the Eiffel Tower disappear. That does require some kind of talent.”

Still unimpressed and cynical to boot, Lois replied, “Big deal. Wires, mirrors, trap doors. They all have their little secrets.”

As if the dawn had suddenly broken, Clark said, “Oh. Now I get it.”

“Get what?”

“Why you don’t like magic! Or masquerades.”

With a disbelieving smile, Lois said, “Oh, do tell.”

“It drives you crazy not to be in on the secret. You always have to know everything about everything.”

Lois had the feeling that Clark was talking about a particular secret, but replied in a general sense, “That’s not true, I love to be surprised.” She thought about that for a second before she finished, “As long as I know about it in advance.”

Lois knew that he was teasing her as he continued, “Classic control freak behavior.”

Lois continued the banter, “Well, thank you Dr. Freud.”

Clark became somewhat more serious as he said, “Full disclosure, no stone left unturned. That’s what makes you a good reporter, I guess.”

Lois returned to the bantering tone, “You guess?”

Clark turned philosophical as he said, “Life doesn’t always have to go according to plan, Lois. That would be boring. We’ve seen that in the time we’ve been together.”

“Yes, I would have to agree, being with you, life is never boring. But why do we need magic? Our life is exciting enough without it.”

“I’m saying it could use a little mystery every once in a while, that’s all.”

Their conversation was interrupted by the ooohs and aaaahs of the audience at the conclusion of the illusion that was being performed. Their attention was drawn to the stage where they actually saw Darren Romick for the first time. He was tall, somewhat overweight and wore his hair somewhat longer than

current style dictated. He was in a tuxedo and had a ‘stage presence’ that couldn’t be denied. The audience was obviously enthralled by his performance.

He bowed to the audience and as he straightened again, held out his hand to the side of the stage and said, “Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. And now, for my final illusion I shall be calling, once again, on assistance from the lovely Constance.”

A beautiful blond wearing little more than a bathing suit as far as how much skin was covered came sparkling onto the stage. Sparkling because her costume was covered in spangles and she also had some ostrich plumes strategically placed to enhance the costume. Black fishnet stockings and the stiletto heels completed the ensemble.

Lois nudged Clark and said, “Eyes here, Buster. I know you have a weakness for blonds.”

He smiled and replied, “Ah, but my fatal weakness is for a certain brunette.”

While they had been talking, Romick had continued his announcement, “I’m going to need some help from the audience on this one, too. Feel free to call out as we go along. Now first, we’re going to need an object from right here in this room. Anyone?”

In response there was a chorus of voices shouting the names of objects. After a few seconds of this Romick called a halt and said, “I heard table.” He pointed at a nearby table and said, “How about that one right there?” He stepped down from the stage, picked up the light from the center of the table and tossed it to Clark who caught it neatly. Then picking up the indicated table, lifted it, drinks and all onto the stage, surprising the patrons that had been sitting there.

Over his shoulder to the guests he asked, “You don’t mind, do you? In fact, why don’t the two of you just bring your chairs and sit right up here on the stage.” He turned to Constance and said, “Constance? Help the lovely couple, would you?”

Picking up their chairs the couple followed Constance onto the stage.

Once they were settled, Romick announced, “Next I need a dead animal.”

Again there were shouts from the audience. Romick listened, apparently until he heard what he wanted to hear and then said, “Did I hear ... rat?”

The audience displayed their displeasure at this by booing.

Romick again stepped down off of the stage and into the audience and started looking around. As he searched he continued his patter, “We must have a special telepathy tonight folks because I believe there’s one in here somewhere. Could you all just check under your tables please? Oh! Okay, here’s one. It’s not a rat but it’s close.”

To everyone’s surprise he lifted up a mink stole from a woman in the audience. He looked at it and back to the owner and asked, “Mink, right? You don’t mind if I borrow this for a few minutes, do you?” At her nod of agreement he said, “Great.”

As if there was a never ending supply of props backstage, Constance went into the wings and returned with a coat rack. Romick handed the mink to her and she placed it on the coat rack. He turned back to the owner and asked, “Real fur?”

The owner nodded in agreement and Romick shook his head and said, “You know, some people can get really militant about that. I hear they splatter paint all over these things.” Turning back to the owner he asked, “You’re not worried are you? I mean, it’s only a trick, right? Boy, are you naive. Next, I need a \*live\* animal. Okay, a live animal that you’d like to see at a zoo or on a farm.”

Again, Romick cupped his hand over his ear and listened as the names of animals were shouted out. There were calls of kangaroo, hippopotamus, giant panda as well as others. Romick allowed the shouts to continue until he heard what he wanted to

hear. Finally he called a halt and said, “Giant Panda, too easy. Oh, oh, did I hear cow? Now you’re challenging me. Constance, any chance of a Guernsey?”

Disappearing into the wings briefly, Constance quickly reappeared with a cow on a tether.

Seeing this Romick continued his patter, “What do you know?! Telepathy folks. Now, clearly I have no control over these items. There has been no prearrangement and surely no trap door can possibly accommodate all of them at once, so what I’m about to do is ... truly impossible. Unless, of course, you believe in magic. Okay, we have a table and a lovely couple, a mink, cousin of the rat, stole and Sarah the cow.”

Returning to the stage, Romick put his hand on her flank and addressed the cow, “Sarah, did you bring enough cud for us?” The cow moored in reply. Turning back to the audience he said, “Okay, I could not possibly have known what these objects were going to be.”

As Romick continued speaking a giant four-sided curtain emblazoned with moons and stars was lowered from the overhead and he guided it down so that all were enclosed in it. He said, “Now, what I am about to do is completely and utterly impossible. Unless of course you believe ... in ... magic. All it takes is a little imagination.”

As they were doing this, Lois nudged Clark and said, “Clark, look at that curtain. Isn’t that what Christopher described to us?”

Nodding, Clark agreed, “Sure looks like it.”

Romick was continuing his patter, “Now, I need to kill some time so I think I’ll have a cup of Joe.”

Constance, ever ready with the props handed him a cup.

He looked at it and said in a disappointed tone, “Black. I really ...” He said, “Hey, hey, hey, Sarah ...” He reached in through a flap and said, “Give it up now, give it up.” When he pulled the cup out he took a sip and apparently savored his beverage. He held the cup up and as he inverted it he shouted, “Gone!”

As he did there were three flashes and pillars of smoke. The curtain disappeared along with the couple at the table, the mink and the cow.

“And that, my friends, is the mystery of the magic box.”

Romick started taking his bows.

As he did, Lois said to Clark, “Well, you were right about one thing.”

Clark was amazed and it took him a second to respond, “What’s that?”

With a smirk, Lois said, “We’ve got a lead.”

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## Chapter 4

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The next morning, Lois and Clark returned to the Moskal residence to follow-up. To their surprise, Mr. Moskal answered the door himself.

Clark asked if he could speak with Christopher.

Mr. Moskal answered, “I’ve sent him away, for safekeeping. If the kidnapper finds out he’s made a mistake I don’t want Christopher in danger.”

Lois addressed him, “We can understand that, Mr. Moskal, but we need to know more about that box he saw. It’s very important to the investigation.”

Mr. Moskal was adamant, “I thought I made myself clear. There is to be no investigation either by the police or the Daily Planet.”

Clark saw Rose as she approached. Mr. Moskal heard her and said, in a questioning manner, “Rose?”

Rose replied, “Telephone, Mr. Moskal.”

“Oh, all right. Thank you. Please show them out.” He turned on his heel and left.

Rose waited until he was out of earshot before speaking,

“He’s meeting the kidnapper with the money tonight. Everything’s going to be okay.”

Clark, thinking about how Superman could insure that outcome said, “I’m sure it will be.” Turning away, Lois and Clark left.

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While Lois and Clark had been at the Moskals residence, Jimmy had been perusing the wire service output again. He was reading as a news story was being printed, “Herbert Ralston, owner of the four-star Fitz-Ralston Hotel chain has announced he will convert all his facilities into shelters for the homeless. Something weird is going on. All these famous people doing crazy things.”

Cat had been looking over his shoulder while he was reading. Cat was dressed in an all black outfit this morning complete with beret. The high necked jacket was buttoned all the way to the top.

Jimmy tore the story off the printer as he finished reading and Cat grabbed it from his hand as he turned, “Sounds like good gossip to me.” She started for her desk with Jimmy close behind. Jimmy asked, “Another date with Chow? This is getting pretty serious.”

Cat had her fingers at the collar of her jacket like she was trying to stretch the material as one tries to loosen a noose around their neck in order to breathe. “Seriously stifling.” Suddenly, Cat gave a yank and the seams of the outfit seemed to rip apart with the sound of Velcro releasing. Underneath was one of Cat’s more Cat-like dresses, loud in color, short in length, backless and form fitting. Once she had thrown the black suit aside she leaned back in a victory position and said, “Yes!” She ripped off the beret and flipped her hair into her more normal do.

As she finished her transformation, Lois and Clark walked in from their visit with the Moskals. Lois was startled and addressing Cat inquired, “What happened to the ‘new’ you?”

Cat gave Lois a look and said, “The ‘old’ me wanted out for a while. I don’t know how you ... regular girls do it. Those clothes are like ... straightjackets.” Cat was leaning on her desk with one hand and with her hip thrust out had her free hand on that hip and was facing Lois.

Looking beyond Cat, Lois, careful not to betray herself by keeping a straight face asked, “What’s Arthur Chow doing here?”

In a panic and so fast that you would think that Cat possessed superspeed she spun and dropped behind a separator. Slowly she peeked over the separator and asked, “Where? Did he see me?”

Lois and Jimmy were both smiling as Lois smirked, “That was almost \*too\* easy,” and started laughing as she moved the rest of the way to her desk.

As she did, Cat followed her, “That was low. Even for you.” She sauntered off as Clark walked up.

“Two o’clock, Magic Club. Darren Romick won’t there but his assistant said she’d be glad to talk to us.”

Sarcastically, Lois replied, “Somehow I don’t think the Great Romick is going to be greatly cooperative.”

Jimmy was eager to follow up on his earlier success during the Nightfall incident and said, “Let me come, too. Maybe I could write a side bar on your story.”

Lois was actually happy to help Jimmy further his career, but felt that there would be a stumbling block. She said, “It’d be okay with us, Jimmy, but I don’t think Perry’ll go for it.”

With a smirk, Jimmy said, “I believe I have that covered.”

Perry happened to be walking by just then and Jimmy addressed him, “Mr. White! I’ve got an idea.” He rushed to get in front of Perry.

Perry stopped and asked, “What is it now, Olsen?”

“Why don’t I help Clark and Lois on this kidnapping story? I could bring my camera and even maybe write a sidebar.”

Perry looked down. The expression on his face did not bode well for Jimmy’s proposal.

Jimmy asked, “Whadda ya say, \*Chief\*?” He placed a lot of emphasis on the word, Chief.

Perry’s head snapped up. His hand came up and he double pointed his fingers at Jimmy and said, “That’s brilliant, Olsen.”

After he said it, Perry had a bewildered expression on his face. He couldn’t understand where that had come from. He walked off shaking his head.

Lois and Clark looked at each other with surprised expressions as Jimmy beamed with pleasure.

Turning to Lois and Clark Jimmy said, “What did I tell you? I think things are finally going to be a little different around here.”

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Lois, Clark and Jimmy arrived at the magic club and found Constance. This time rather than a swim suit with spangles she was dressed in a knee length black skirt and a white blouse. She started giving them a tour. They went into the main room and while Lois and Clark examined the giant magic box, which was actually a curtain she started telling the history. “This place was built over forty years ago. A group of magicians wanted a club for themselves. My father was a charter member. It was a very secret society. Even now it is only open to members and their guests.”

Clark ceased his examination of the curtain and the stage and approached Constance. “We’re here because of the kidnappings. One of the intended victims said something about a magic box. When we saw your trick last night, it made us think a magician may be involved. The description of the box was much like this curtain.”

Swinging her head around, as if looking at the members said, “Someone from here?”

Lois responded, “We’re not sure yet.” Lois’s tone became more eager as she continued, “So, this box thing, tell us how it works.”

Constance tempered her reply, “Well, it’s a combination of distraction ...”

She was interrupted by another voice, “... and genius.” Dr. Novak moved onto the stage. He approached Lois and continued, “Darren Romick is the greatest that ever lived, and I don’t think he’d appreciate having his secrets revealed. Wouldn’t you agree, Constance?”

Abashed, Constance replied, “Yes, Doctor.” She turned as if being dismissed and walked off.

As soon as Jimmy saw Dr. Novak he moved over and tried to disappear, himself, pretending to examine the curtain.

Dr. Novak still recognized Jimmy and asked, “Well, how is our little experiment going?”

Jimmy was uncomfortable with the question and said simply, “Uh, fine. Just fine.”

Lois’s curiosity was aroused by this and asked, “What experiment?”

Now Jimmy was profoundly embarrassed that his secret was about to be revealed, “It’s nothing.”

Doctor Novak replied to Lois’s question, “Just a small post-hypnotic suggestion we gave to this young man’s boss.”

Clark and Lois were both aghast, Clark blurted out, “You hypnotized Perry?”

Jimmy brightened up and said, “It worked, didn’t it? Every time I say the word ‘Chief,’ the Chief tells me I’m brilliant.”

Lois looked at Jimmy and said, “Jimmy, that’s terrible.” She thought about it for a second and then asked, “Will it work if I say it?”

Clark gave Lois a look as if to say, “Lois, why would you even ask such a thing?”

Dr. Novak chuckled and said, “The post-hypnotic suggestion was very precise. Only Jimmy’s voice will trigger the response.”

Clark said, “So Perry doesn’t ...”

Jimmy interrupted and said, “... have to know.”

Romick suddenly entered through a side door. As he approached he said, “Visitors aren’t welcome until after six o’clock.”

Clark replied, “We’re from the Daily Planet.”

Romick was sarcastic as he replied, “How nice for you.”

Lois replied, “We think your box trick is linked to a series of kidnappings.”

Romick apparently felt insulted, he almost shouted, “Trick!?! Dogs do tricks. I do illusions! Would you like to see one?”

Lois said, “Uh, no, I . . .”

Romick interrupted her, “You’re a reporter, right? You should be really good at observation.” Pulling out a deck of cards he started to fan them out. He continued speaking as he did and Lois strolled over closer, “Maybe I can trip you up a little bit. This deck of cards here, when you see a black card say, coal. When you see a red card say, fire. Okay, keep your wits about you now.”

Holding up the deck so that she could see the bottom card he tapped it and said, “Okay, what is it?”

Lois deciding to play along saw a nine of clubs and said, “Coal.”

Romick said, “Ooo. A natural.”

He changed the card, this time it was the eight of spades and Lois said, “Coal.”

“Oh, very good.”

He changed the card again. This time it was the ace of clubs and Lois said, “Coal.”

Lois didn’t notice it, but this time as he changed the card he pinched the deck between his fingers, putting tension on them to straighten out. She saw the king of diamonds.

She said, “Fire,” and when she did he changed his grip on the deck and it came squirting out in a stream, right into her face. At the impact she shied away and shouted, Oh!”

As this was happening, there was a flash and a puff of smoke and Romick and Dr. Novak both disappeared.

Lois, Clark and Jimmy all looked around in bewilderment.

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Since there was no longer anyone to talk to at the Magic Club, Lois, Clark and Jimmy headed back to the Planet arriving after most of the day staff had already left.

As they were walking in, Perry spotted them and inquired, “So, what’ve you got?”

Throwing down her bag, Lois said, “Only a theory,” in a disgusted tone.

The delay in their return to the Planet was explained as Clark told Perry what they had been doing, “After we left the Magic Club I called the box trick manufacturer. There were only two made with that specific moon and stars design and they both belong to Darren Romick.”

Lois floated her proposal, “I think we’ve got enough for a preliminary article. What do you think . . .” She decided to test her theory, hope actually, that the programming that had been done on Perry would also apply to her, “\*Chief\*?”

Realizing immediately what Lois was doing, Clark started watching Perry closely, just as Lois was doing to see what reaction this would have.

Lois was disappointed when there was no reaction, other than a normal Perry reaction, “Absolutely not! All you’ve got is speculation and you both know it.” He turned away, shaking his head and moved toward his office.

Resignedly, Lois muttered, “Well, so much for that.”

Before Perry had a chance to make it to his office, Jimmy intercepted him and handed him a photograph, saying, “Look at this.”

Perry looked at it and as if stating the obvious, said, “It’s the Pope. So what?”

Pointing at the background, Jimmy said, “Yeah. At a

\*Madonna\* concert. Famous people are acting really strange lately. I think there’s a story here. Whaddya say I write it, \*Chief\*?”

Just like the last time, Perry’s hand came up, he double pointed at Jimmy and said, “That’s brilliant, Olsen.” Also, just as last time, Perry was perplexed by this behavior. He couldn’t understand why he was doing that and as he puzzled over the problem turned and finished his trip to the office.

Jimmy watched as Perry closed his door and then turning to Lois and Clark, rubbed his hands together and said, “Putty in my hands.”

Clark challenged, “Jimmy, don’t you think what you’re doing is a little . . . unethical?”

Jimmy smiled and replied, “Hey, it’s not like I’m asking him to send me to Tahiti or anything. This is strictly business. Although, a weekend in Florida would be nice . . .”

Lois challenged, “Jimmy . . .”

Coming back to reality, Jimmy said, “Forget I mentioned it.”

Lois looked at her watch and realized that it had been some time since lunch. She asked, “So, who’s hungry? We’ve only got about two hours.”

Jimmy was curious, “Until what?”

Lois enlightened Jimmy, “Moskal meets the kidnapper at midnight. Clark and I plan to be there.”

Clark was planning to be there all right, but as Superman. He couldn’t believe that Lois was inviting Jimmy to go along. In an attempt to discourage this he said, “I don’t think that’s such a good idea.”

Lois was mystified, “Why not?”

Clark couldn’t believe that Lois was being so single minded on this and not picking up on his need to be there as Superman. He said, “It’s dangerous for one thing.”

Lois countered, “When has that ever stopped us?”

Clark wracked his brain for another deterrent, “I don’t think we should get in the way. The best thing to do is wait it out and talk to Moskal afterwards.”

Lois finally appeared to be picking up on his hints as she said, “You know, you’re right,” but he was still surprised.

He blurted out, “I am?”

Lois answered, “Yes. We should be adult about this. There’s no reason to get in the middle of it. We’ll write the story when Rose’s son is safely returned home.”

“I’m proud of you, Lois.”

“Thank you, Clark. Now, I don’t know about you, but I’m hungry. Why don’t you go get us some take out?” She moved over and gave him a hug. While hugging him she whispered, “Use this excuse to be there as Superman. I’m going to bring Jimmy and we are simply going to watch.”

Smiling he donned his coat and headed out.

Once he was out the door, Lois said to Jimmy, “Grab your camera. We’re going to be at that meeting.”

Jimmy asked, “What about Clark?”

“He’ll get over it. We can eat when we get back.”

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## Chapter 5

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The location of the drop off of the ransom was The Hobs Bay Carnival. At this time of the year the carnival closed early so the area was completely deserted and lent an eerie feel to the atmosphere. The weather contributed to the eeriness in that it was dark and cold and a ground fog had developed which limited visibility somewhat.

Lois parked at a distance so that her Jeep wouldn’t be seen and then she and Jimmy walked the rest of the way. They weren’t exactly sure where the drop would be made so they crept between ticket booths and rides looking for a central location that they could watch from without being seen.

Jimmy grumbled, “I’m beginning to appreciate the office. It’s freezing out here.”

As they were approaching another ticket booth the fog was lit up by a pair of approaching headlights. They quickly ducked out of sight and peeked around the corner.

Jimmy started to say something and Lois hissed, “Shhhhh. Don’t talk. Just take the pictures, will you?”

When the car pulled to a halt they could see that it was a luxury sedan. It had to be Moskal. Confirming Lois’s supposition, Mr. Moskal opened the door and stepped out. He leaned back into the car and when he stood up again he had a small suitcase in his hand. He closed the car door and looked at his watch.

Mr. Moskal wasn’t sure just how the exchange would be made so, as if to announce his presence he shouted, “I’m here. Alone. Where’s the boy?”

Suddenly, as if in response to his shout, the lights came on and the music began to play as the carousel nearby started up. As it moved in a circle, Mr. Moskal spotted Nick, riding one of the horses, however there was an ephemeral quality to his appearance which fit right in with the general atmosphere.

Lois nudged Jimmy and whispered, “Are you getting this?”

As if in response to her query she heard the camera shutter. She decided that Jimmy must have thought ahead and loaded Infrared film because there was no flash.

Spotting the boy, Mr. Moskal shouted, “Nicky!”

Suddenly the blue and red clad superhero swooped in and attempted to grab Nicky. His confidence was displayed when he announced, “I’ve got him.” Unfortunately, just as he would have grabbed the boy, he vanished and Superman’s hands passed through thin air. When Nicky vanished the carousel stopped.

Lois and Jimmy both stared in disbelief at what they had seen. Lois nudged Jimmy and said, “Keep shooting!”

She heard the shutter flying again.

With a bewildered expression on his face, Superman was standing on the carousel, looking around when Mr. Moskal ran up and shouted, “What have you done? Where’s the boy?”

Superman came to the realization that it had all been a trick, started using his super vision to examine the area and said, “He was never here.” He stopped examining the immediate confines of the carousel and broadened his search finally spotting a dark car at a distance.

Superman set off in that direction and seeing his approach the driver’s door opened and a figure in a dark cloak and hood emerged. When he was close the hooded figure pulled out a gold pocket watch and started to twirl it.

In a throaty whisper the figure said, “See the watch, only the watch. Hear my voice, only my voice. Your mind is clear, your will is gone. You will obey my commands any time you hear this phrase: ‘The moon and the stars.’ Wrong will seem right to you. And you will not remember.”

Superman simply stood there, apparently staring at the watch while the hooded figure talked.

Because of where they were, Lois and Jimmy were straining to see what was going on. Hoping that Jimmy’s eyes were better than hers, Lois asked, “What’s going on?”

She was disappointed when Jimmy said, “I don’t know.”

Just then a breeze blew up and cleared the fog, temporarily and Lois was able to see into the car. What she saw sent a cold chill down her spine. Nick was sitting in the passenger seat and he was staring straight ahead with no emotions on his face at all. Lois shouted, “Superman, it’s Nick.”

Superman remained rooted to the spot. At Lois’s shout both Jimmy and Mr. Moskal started running in the direction of the car.

The hooded figure jumped in and drove off. As the car left, Superman took off and disappeared into the night sky.

Jimmy was surprised and said, “What the ????”

Lois summed it up by saying, “It’s like Superman’s been

hypnotized.”

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When Lois and Jimmy returned to the Planet, Clark was there waiting for them. Lois was a little surprised to see him.

He asked “And where have you two been?”

Jimmy was all a fluster, “You should have been there, CK. The kidnapper was there and it looks like Superman has been hypnotized and they got away with the money and the kid.”

“Lois, I thought we had agreed to wait.”

Lois said, “Yeah, well, we decided that we could be there to watch and not interfere.”

“Well, I think it’s about time we went home.”

Lois gave him a wary eye as she said, “Okay, let’s go.”

Jimmy watched as together they entered the elevator to go home.

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When they arrive at the apartment, Lois dropped her bag and confronted Clark, “What happened out there? Why didn’t you rescue Nicky? Were you hypnotized?”

He laughed and said, “Whoa, one thing at a time. What happened? The vision of Nicky on the carousel was done with mirrors. I found them when I examined the structure after the image disappeared.”

“Okay, that explains that part. Why didn’t you rescue him from the car when you had the chance?”

“I saw Nicky and it looked like he had been drugged or else was under a post-hypnotic suggestion. He wasn’t responding to external stimuli. I felt that it would be best to allow the kidnapper to take care of him since they know which it is. By removing him I could have been putting him in jeopardy.”

“Oh, yeah, I can see that. What about the hypnotism thing?”

“I had to play along with that for Nicky’s sake. Also we need to find out who all is behind this and what the ultimate goal is. I couldn’t necessarily do that by just grabbing that hooded figure. That could have been a stooge.”

“So, where do we go from here?”

“I have to make the person in the hood think that they succeeded in hypnotizing me by playing along.”

\*\*\*

When they arrived at the Planet the next morning they found Jimmy asleep on his desk still wearing the same clothes as he’s had on the previous night. Next to his head on the desk was the explanation of why he had spent the night at the office. Lois spotted prints of the pictures he had taken the night before.

Without disturbing Jimmy, Lois and Clark went through the photos and decided which ones to use and then wrote up the story. One of the pictures to be used was of Superman staring at the watch. They wanted to give the impression that the hypnosis had succeeded.

One disturbing fact was the angle from which Jimmy had been taking the pictures. You could see the watch and the hand on the chain, but not the hooded figure.

Seeing this picture, Lois snickered. Clark had explained that he had actually been looking through the watch using his x-ray vision and not at it the way the supposed hypnotist had thought.

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The afternoon edition featured the picture of Superman and the headline: “SUPER-PSYCHE.”

Lois said to Jimmy, “You did it, Jimmy, you’re on the front page again.”

“Yeah. I just wish it didn’t make Superman look so bad.”

Clark walked up just then and overhearing Jimmy said, “Don’t worry, Jimmy. It’ll all come out in the wash.”

Turning to Lois, Jimmy asked, “Are you sure Superman was hypnotized last night?”

Lois replied, “I can’t think of any other explanation for what he did.”

Jimmy said, “But he just let the kidnapper drive away with the kid!”

Lois nodded and said, “I’m sure he had his reasons, Jimmy.”  
“I’m really worried about him, though.”

Reassuringly, Clark said, “Don’t worry, Jim. He’ll be okay.”

Perry exited his office and approached the trio. “I just got off the phone with the Chief of Police. There was no evidence left on the scene and nothing in your photographs that pointed to anybody but Superman.”

Lois blurted out, “What about that hooded figure? We all saw it, even Moskal!”

Perry interrupted her tirade, “And he’s not talking. Now I’m not telling you to drop this story ‘cause I believe you saw what you said you did. We just need something concrete, that’s all.”

Jimmy offered, “Great. We’ll just get a signed confession from the kidnapper and hand it over to the police chief.” A second after the word was out of his mouth, Jimmy realized what he had said, but it was too late.

Right on cue, Perry raised his hand, two finger pointed at Jimmy and said, “That’s brilliant, Olsen.” Again, Perry was mystified as to just why that had happened he patted Jimmy on the back and shaking his head in consternation, turned and headed back to his office.

Watching Perry’s retreating back, Jimmy said, to no one in particular, “This is really starting to bug me.”

Just then Lois’s phone rang so she reached to answer it. “Lois Lane. Great, we’ll be right there.” She hung up the phone and turned to Clark, “That was Constance. We’re going to find out more about the Magnificent Romick. Come on, let’s go.”

Clark said, “You go ahead. I’ve got someone else I want to talk to.”

Lois nodded her understanding she said, “Come on, Jimmy. Let’s go,” and grabbing her bag, headed out.

\*\*\*

Half an hour later, Lois and Jimmy were at the magic club and meeting with Constance.

Constance was speaking, “You can understand, can’t you? He can be very ... difficult sometimes.”

Lois promised, “Completely off the record. You’re an anonymous source.”

Before speaking, Constance looked around as if to assure herself that they wouldn’t be overheard. “Darren went through a real bad period about a year ago. He had run up a lot of debt and at the same time he lost his big contract in Vegas.”

Lois offered, “Gambling problem?”

Nodding in agreement, Constance said, “Big one, but not in the way you would think. The casino owner found out Darren disguised himself and used his skills to cheat at the tables. He had been doing it for years. Anyway, after that Darren was black listed and wiped out financially. No one would hire him. At least he didn’t go to jail.”

“Wow, you’re right. Not what I expected. But he’s back on top now.”

Nodding again, Constance continued, “About three months ago things started to change. He was rich again. I thought he might be back to gambling but he told me it was all from an anonymous benefactor.”

Lois suggested, “Or a series of kidnappings.”

Apparently shocked at the suggestion, Constance said, “You don’t think Darren ...”

Lois stated, “That’s exactly what I think. What about hypnosis? Does Darren know how to do that?”

Another nod, “Yes, we’ve used it in our act. Look, you don’t know anything for sure. I mean, you have no proof, do you?”

Lois shook her head and said, “Not yet. But if it’s him, I’ll find some sooner or later.”

Unseen by Lois and Constance, Darren Romick was hidden

around the corner and heard every word spoken.

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Almost as soon as Lois and Jimmy left, Dr. Novak arrived. He had come at Clark’s request. Clark conducted him into the conference room and had a long discussion with him regarding hypnosis as they waited for their other guests to arrive.

After a short time a group of people arrived. Clark greeted them and a group at a time were brought into the conference room. The final visitor was a young girl. Like all of the others, she was one of the children that had been kidnapped and the last of several whose parents had finally been persuaded to allow them to be talked to.

While her parents watched, Dr. Novak placed her under hypnosis and asked her some questions. The girl’s parents were very surprised at what they heard. At the conclusion of the session Dr. Novak said, “When I snap my fingers you will awaken, feeling happy and safe, five, four, three, two, one.” (Snap!)

When he snapped his fingers, she opened her eyes and looked at him, questioningly and then at her parents. She asked, “Is it over?”

Dr. Novak answered, “Yes. You did very well, my dear. You may go to your mother now.”

Standing up, she took her mother’s hand and the family left.

Once they were alone in the conference room, Dr. Novak said, “Definitely hypnosis. I don’t think that drugs were involved, although I can’t say for certain. They were each given a powerful suggestion to forget everything that happened to them while they were kidnapped, so powerful, in fact, that I cannot reverse it, only identify it.”

Clark said, “There’s got to be something that can help us.”

As if musing to himself, Dr. Novak said, “The only image that a few of them kept remembering was the night sky, specifically the moon and the stars.”

Clark’s expression changed slightly when he heard that and asked, “What did you say?”

Repeating it for Clark’s benefit, he said, “The moon and stars.”

Clark nodded his head and said, “I have one more favor to ask of you ...”

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A few minutes after Dr. Novak left, Cat approached Clark, “Hey, Clark, Perry couldn’t find Jimmy so he asked me to tell you that there’s a rogue general in the Persian Gulf about to launch a missile against the President’s order. Perry wants you on it right away.”

Clark headed for the stairwell saying over his shoulder, “I’m on it.”

Almost as soon as Clark hit the stairwell he heard over the radio that the subordinates in the missile control center had overcome the general and averted the crisis. Spinning into Superman he exited the stairwell onto the roof and took off. His actions had some urgency to them.

\*\*\*

A short time later, Lois and Jimmy exited a cab in front of the Daily Planet after her interview with Constance. As they stepped to the sidewalk they heard a metallic ripping crunching noise and looking in that direction saw Superman approaching. What Lois saw startled her. As Superman was walking down the street he was ripping up the parking meters lining the street.

Surprised at this behavior, Lois shouted, “Superman!”

Jimmy had been startled by what was happening for a second, but then coming out of his stupor brought up his camera and started snapping pictures.

Superman appeared to ignore them as he strode by continuing his path of destruction. She heard him muttering, over and over, “Wrong is right. Wrong is right.”

After he passed her he took to the air and flew away.  
Lois was flabbergasted. She stared after him in open-mouthed wonder and worry.

Grabbing Jimmy she said, “Come on. We need to tell the Chief.”

\*\*\*

A few minutes later Clark landed in the back yard in Smallville and spun into his work clothes.

Jonathan had heard him arrive and came out of the barn just as Martha came out of the kitchen.

Jonathan asked, “What brings you here in the middle of the day?”

Smiling he said, “I wanted to let you know that you don’t have to worry about what you may read in the paper. You see, I’ve gone undercover as Superman. There may be some stories that could cause you to worry and I wanted to let you know that you don’t need to.”

Martha said, “We saw that picture of someone trying to hypnotize you. What’s up?”

“Well, that’s it. In order to get to the bottom of this, I have to play along ... allow the kidnappers to think they succeeded. That way I should be able to lure them out into the open and prevent any more harm being done.”

“Okay, we’ll ignore the stories. You be careful, you hear me?”

“Yes, Mom. I hear you. I need to get back. Lois is going to be wondering what happened to me.”

\*\*\*

A few minutes later, Superman landed on the roof of the Daily Planet and a couple of minutes after that Clark Kent exited the stairwell into the newsroom. Looking around he spotted Lois at her desk and headed in her direction.

Sensing his approach, Lois looked up at him with worry in her eyes.

He smiled in reply and reached for her hand. Taking it he guided her to the conference room.

As soon as the door was closed she rounded on him and challenged, “All right, what’s the story? What’s going on? Why were you acting that way?”

“I can’t explain just yet, but I need you to write up the incident just as you observed it. Make sure that one of Jimmy’s photos accompanies the story, okay?”

Lois was still worried, “Why can’t you tell me? I’m so worried about you, damaging public property that way.”

Clark pulled her into his arms and said, “Things aren’t always what they appear to be. Trust me on this. There’s a good explanation. You just have to wait for it. Lois, Superman is undercover. I can’t even tell you why because I don’t want you to give it away.” He gave her a kiss to calm her fears.”

“When will you be able to tell me?”

“Probably not until we wrap up this case.”

“What case?”

“The kidnapped youngsters.”

“Is it important that this story run?”

“Yes, it is. The kidnappers need to believe that Superman has been hypnotized.”

A look of dawning comprehension came over Lois’s features. “I was going to ask Perry to squash it. You want them to think you are under their control so that they might make a mistake.”

“That is essentially it. With your help we may be able to break this case. Look, I can’t stick around. I have some more things that need to be done. I’ll meet you at the Magic Club this evening.”

“Why there?”

“We may be getting near the end of the story.”

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That afternoon there was a story about how Superman was

seen destroying parking meters in the downtown area and quoting what he was saying, “Wrong is right.”

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## Chapter 6

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As a follow-up to the investigation Lois went to a performance at the Magic Club that evening. There was a dress code for the club so Lois was wearing a black cocktail dress with a scoop neck and a black choker which just emphasized the creamy color of her neck. She had been present for several minor demonstrations, some card tricks and a mentalist routine. It was time for the featured performer to take the stage.

Just as Darren Romick was making his appearance, Clark arrived. He had changed into his tuxedo before coming to the club and when he entered took a seat at the table with his wife.

As he sat down, Lois hissed, “Where have you been all day?”

“Taking care of things. What have you found out?”

Keeping her voice low, Lois said, “Constance told me that Romick’s had a heavy infusion of cash in the last three months. He’s also well-versed in hypnosis.”

“There are a number of people that know hypnosis, Dr. Novak for instance.”

Lois put all of her conviction into her statement, “I know it’s Romick. I just have to prove it.” She lowered her voice even more as she continued, “I was so scared. You really made Superman look like he was completely out of control ...”

Clark interrupted her, “Or under someone else’s control. Don’t worry; we’re going to put a stop to this.”

Looking at the stage, Lois decided that the coast would be clear so as she stood, she said, “I’m going backstage to see what I can find. He’ll be out here for at least another twenty minutes.”

Realizing that things were reaching a critical point, Clark tried to stop her, “Lois, wait ...”

Clark might just as well have saved his breath for all the good it would do, but he became even more apprehensive as she stood because just at that moment, Romick announced yet another illusion.

“For my next illusion, I’m going to need an assistant from our audience.” He spotted Lois as she was standing and said, “It looks like we have a volunteer, she’s already standing up.” Romick had recognized Lois and was deliberately calling on her almost as an act of revenge, “Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome on stage Lois Lane from the Daily Planet.”

As Romick was speaking and introducing her the rest of the audience started to applaud and she was pegged by a spotlight. All of this prevented Lois from carrying out her intended investigation of the backstage area.

Clark said, “I don’t think you should ...”

She whispered back, “What can he do to me in front of all these people? Especially with you watching out for me.”

She gave Clark a crestfallen look as she headed for the stage. He smiled a reassuring smile in return.

As Lois slowly made her way to the stage, Romick encouraged her, “Now, don’t be shy, Miss Lane. I believe we can put all your doubts about illusion to rest this evening.”

The next illusion was the sword cabinet. Lois watched as Constance wheeled it out on stage. It was a narrow coffin-like box on wheels open at both ends and see through because the sides were down.

Lois was apprehensive, but Romick opened the box and said, “All you have to do is lay down inside.”

Lois sat in the box and Romick slid a plate with holes for her legs in place. He said, “You may want to lie down in there.”

She did and he slid another plate in place which had a single hole for her neck. She looked worriedly at Clark.

After putting in the neck plate Romick flipped up the sides of the box.

As he was closing the sides, Romick challenged her, “Come now, Miss Lane. You’re not afraid, are you? It’s only a trick, after all, isn’t that what you said before?”

Turning back to the audience, Romick went into his patter, “This is one of the most dangerous illusions in all of magic.”

While he was speaking, Constance wheeled a covered rack on stage. It was at an angle that Lois couldn’t see it. If she had, she might have been more worried. When Constance removed the drape she revealed a rack of very shiny double edged swords.

Clark didn’t like the implications of this ‘trick’. It would be all too easy for an accident to happen. He quickly x-rayed the swords. His concern increased as he did. There was one that was different from all of the rest. They were all metal, but all but one was of a fairly flexible metal. He x-rayed the box and saw that the sides were deeper than he had expected. There was a complex mechanism that was triggered by the entry of the sword. It triggered the release of a sword tip that protruded from the corresponding slit, making it appear as though it had passed through. The problem was the one blade that wasn’t a fake, flexible sword like the others. He’d have to keep a close watch.

Constance selected a sword and handed it to Romick. When she did it came into Lois’s field of view and Clark could hear her heart rate spike as she really began to worry. She cast a glance in Clark’s direction. Romick tapped it and it gave a metallic ring. Romick addressed Lois, “I hope you have faith in me, my dear.” Approaching the box he selected a slot and started to gently pushed the sword in. He acted like he was meeting some resistance. He stopped, looked at Lois and asked, “Did you have a big dinner or something?” Then he gave it a strong shove. The tip apparently came through the other side.

Romick and Constance spun the cabinet to demonstrate that fact.

Constance handed Romick another sword from the rack. Clark kept close tabs on which sword was chosen. Before plunging this sword in, Romick addressed Lois, “Feeling lucky?”

Lois gave him a wan smile and he plunged the sword in.

This was continued until five swords had been thrust ‘through’ Lois at various angles. There was one more sword left. Romick addressed the audience, “Now, I know what you’re thinking. \*Any\* amateur could do this trick as long as he lined the holes up right. So, if I were to, say, \*blindfold\* myself ...”

Reaching into his pocket he pulled out a blindfold bag and proceeded to slip over his head. Then he continued his patter, “... then I couldn’t see where I was placing the sword.”

Constance handed Romick the final sword. When she did, because of the weight it dipped and touched the ground. Everyone could hear the metallic clang as it did. Clark knew that this was in fact a real sword. This one was slated to go through the top of the chest, right through Lois’s torso.

Clark knew he had to prevent this from happening. He lowered his glasses and sent a blast of heat vision at the blade, softening it so that when he pressed on it against the cabinet the blade actually bent.

The feel was different and Romick realized that there was something wrong. He ripped off the blindfold. Seeing the bent blade he made a joke of it by saying, “Well, I guess they don’t make swords like they used to. How about a hand for the lovely Miss Lane?”

Romick led the applause and then said, “We’re not through yet, Watch her ... keep an eye on her.” He threw a large drape over Lois and the box. As soon as the drape was in place all the audience saw was a flash and a billow of smoke then the drape fell to the floor ... empty.

It had all happened so fast that Clark had been caught off guard and hadn’t had time to lower his glasses so that he could use his x-ray vision to see what was happening. He was as mystified as the rest as to just where Lois had gone. His only

consolation was that he could still hear her heartbeat, but it appeared to be coming from ... below.

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Lois was taken completely by surprise, in fact she was so surprised that she was speechless. Not so much as a little ‘yelp’ escaped her lips. One second she was lying there in the box with Romick ‘thrusting swords through her’ and the next he was spreading a cover over her and the entire apparatus.

When he spread the cover several things happened all at once. She heard a bang, like a firecracker going off, she felt herself start to drop, as if the floor had opened under her and the box she had so securely been trapped in collapsed and fell away. Within seconds she found herself free and sliding down a ramp like a slide at a water park, however there was no water. When she hit the bottom she fell into a pile of soft mattresses.

Lois pulled herself together and climbed off of her landing pad and looked around. When she did, she saw Nicky. The boy was quietly sitting in a chair, staring at a television screen.

She called to him, “Nick! Where are we? What’s going on?”

When he didn’t answer her, she starting to get irritated at Nick for ignoring her when the TV came to life. When it did she saw displayed a graphic like the design on the magic box and the drape Romick used in his show. She saw that Nick’s eyes were figuratively glued to the screen. His eyes were fixated and he evinced no expression or emotion.

A few seconds after the graphic came on the audio track started playing, looping over and over, “You’re watching the magic channel. You’re watching the magic channel.” It droned on and on.

Lois was becoming increasingly concerned and tried to talk to Nick, “Wake up,” but her voice lacked conviction.

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As soon as Lois disappeared, Clark started to move. There was enough of a distraction on the stage that no one noticed him get up and leave at a speed just shy of super-speed.

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Lois looked around, taking in her surroundings. Seeing nothing, but blank walls she turned her attention back to Nick and asked, “Nick, how long have you been here?”

When he didn’t respond she moved in front of him and looked closely at his eyes. They had a glassy appearance and were unfocused. She waved her hand in front of his eyes and didn’t elicit a single response. She made the snarky comment, “You’re really giving TV a bad name.”

Glancing over her shoulder, Lois looked briefly at the TV to see what was so fascinating. She thought, <Another magic program,> and looked away. She started looking around at the walls and thought, <There must be a way out of here.> She moved over to one wall and started to feel around the surface looking for any breaks or gaps that could indicated a door of some sort. After covering one wall she went back to Nick and tried again with the same results. She glanced at the TV again, longer this time. After some seconds she shook her head and looked away again. Going to another wall she started searching it as she had done the first. After covering that wall she returned again to Nick. She said to Nick, “Don’t worry, I’m very capable ...” As she was speaking she looked at the TV wondering just what was so fascinating about what was on the screen and stared at it for almost a minute before shaking her head as if to clear it and moving to another wall.

After examining this wall she once again returned to Nick as if driven to reassure him that she could help. This time she was confused and tried to center her thoughts, “What was I ...? Right, got to ...” This time her eyes became fixed on the TV and she stared at it as if mesmerized. Slowly she sank to the floor and sat staring at the screen.

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Clark had been keeping track of Lois's heartbeat and it had gone through several changes. It had raced and slowed and with his knowledge of her he knew that she had experienced fear and anger, panic and calm. Right now her heartbeat was slow and steady which indicated calm and he was relieved. Whatever was happening to her she wasn't angry or scared.

After exiting the room he had returned through a side door and was backstage. There were magic show props scattered all around, including the magic box that Chris had described. Against a back wall was a door marked stairwell. Lowering his glasses he x-rayed through the door and then down the stairwell. Reaching the bottom of the stairs he saw a chamber. In the chamber he saw Lois and Nicky. Lois was sitting on the floor and Nick in a chair, but both of them started blankly at a TV screen. As he was x-raying he spotted the ramp/slide that had taken Lois from the stage to the chamber.

Clark tried the door to the stairwell and found it locked. Just as he was about to punch a hole in the door to open it he remembered that he wasn't in the Suit and stopped. It wasn't time to appear as Superman as yet.

Deciding that Lois wouldn't be in harm's way for a while, Clark snuck out of the club and away. He would have to wait until the club was empty to return as Superman. Then he would have to act.

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Half an hour after the last patron had left, Superman landed at the back door to the magic club and let himself in.

Since he now knew the lay of the land he proceeded directly to the door to the stairwell and smashed it open. He sped down and opened the concealed door into the underground chamber. As soon as the door was open he saw Lois and Nick just where they had been.

He walked over to Lois and asked, "Lois, are you all right?"

Lois didn't so much as blink her eyes in response.

He tried again, "Lois, look at me!" When she didn't respond again, this time he gently turned her head away from the TV and towards himself. When he did there was a glimmer of recognition. She tried to speak, but the sounds were unintelligible. Keeping her face toward him and away from the TV he asked, "Lois, have you been drugged?"

He could see her trying to form the word, 'No', but nothing came out. It suddenly registered that Lois was struggling against his hand to turn back to the TV.

Superman gave the TV his full attention. He looked very closely at the screen and nodded in understanding at what he saw. Without leaving Lois's side he directed a blast of heat vision at the TV, fusing the wiring into a charred mass. There was a puff of smoke. Unlike the smoke pellets Romick used to cover movements on stage, this was a prelude to the TV instantly shutting off.

As soon as the TV shut off, Lois started to come back to herself and shook her head to clear it. She spotted him and asked, "Superman? How?"

Stepping over to the TV he ejected the cassette from the VCR that was attached to it. He held it out to show Lois. The label read, 'Magic Channel — Demo.'

Lois asked, "That's what we were watching? What made it so special?"

Just then, Nick revived and asked, "Superman, where's my mom?"

Superman gave Nick a reassuring smile and said, "We'll get you to her, don't worry. Who did this to you?"

Nick scratched his head and replied, "I ... I don't remember. Someone made me watch TV. There's something strange about it."

Lois nodded her agreement, "Yeah, something ..."

Superman said, "You're both right. That tape was sending

messages. My eyes work a little faster than yours and I caught it when I glanced over. It's called subliminal messaging. It's not a new technique, been used by studios for years. An image is inserted into a movie. It's a single frame so it only registers on the subconscious. They flash a picture of a drink, a box of popcorn or a candy bar. Within minutes there's a run on the snack bar. Since my brain works at super-speed I saw the images for what they were."

Lois, anger in her tone said, "Mind control."

"Not really control, influence. Whoever watches this tape is programmed to submit and wait for further instruction." Picking up Nick, he said, "Come on, let's get you out of here before that can happen." Giving Lois his hand he helped her up the stairs.

When they exited the stairwell, Lois realized where they were and gazed around at all of the magic show props.

As they walked through Nick recognized the magic box and shouted, "Look! It's the box I was in."

Seeing what Nick was pointing out, Lois walked over to it, lifted the lid and looked inside. As she did, she said, "Well, at least we know there's nothing surprising about \*this\* trick anymore." Throwing the lid back and looking in Lois saw Dr. Novak and he looked dead. Startled at the sight, Lois slammed the lid back down before Nick could look in. She looked at Superman and he smiled reassuringly at her. She was surprised by this, but didn't let on and said, "Nope. No surprises."

Superman said, "He figured out who that kidnapper was and ..."

He was interrupted as suddenly Romick stepped out of the shadows and said, "What do you think you're doing? Guests aren't allowed back here."

Interposing himself between Lois and Romick, Superman said, "Sorry, Romick. This is one trick you're not going to get away with."

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## Chapter 7

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Romick, apparently confused asked, "What are you talking about?"

Lois was convinced that Romick was the culprit and started listing the charges, "The kidnappings, mass hypnosis, Dr. Novak, we know all about it."

Romick, obviously still confused said, "Kidnappings? Hypnosis? Dr. Novak! You've made some kind of mistake."

Suddenly another voice interrupted them, "I'm afraid he's right. He doesn't know anything about them." Constance stepped out of the shadows. Once she was in the light she continued, "Darren Romick never had an idea of his own in his entire life."

Rounding on her, Romick asked, "Constance, what have you done?"

With a sneer, Constance replied, "What I should have done a long time ago. I'm in charge now."

Superman started to move on her aggressively, but stopped when she said, "The moon and stars." Superman sensed that everyone in the room responded the same way.

Constance chortled, "It's astonishing how little we know about the mind. Someone like me, for example, with just the rudimentary knowledge of hypnosis that Dr. Novak taught me can turn the world upside down and have even you, Superman, at my whim."

Romick fought to break free of Constance's spell and said, "Fight ... Superman ... You've got to ... fight it ..."

Constance addressed Romick, "Relax, Darren. You're under a very powerful suggestion. Why, you don't even remember killing Dr. Novak for me, do you?"

Darren shook his head in response.

Like all narcissistic megalomaniacs Constance began to gloat about her accomplishments, "Just like the Queen doesn't

remember dancing in her fountain. Or the General who doesn't recall wanting to fire that missile without authorization. They were all test cases. But you, Superman, worked out the best. My post hypnotic command that wrong is right caused you to go on a rampage of destruction in center city! Even something so mundane as ripping up parking meters is significant for you. Now, let's take care of our friends." She turned to Nick and said, "Nick, you see the sword box?"

Nick replied, "Yes, ma'am."

"Go, get inside."

Nick walked over to the box and climbed inside lying down once he was.

Constance ordered, "Superman, close him in and make sure the lock is secure.

Superman closed up the box and wrapped a heavy chain around it and locked it with a padlock.

As he was doing this, Constance addressed Romick, "Next, the magnificent Romick is going to perform his last and most dangerous illusion. Do you see that ladder going all the way up the wall?"

Romick looked where indicated and replied, "Yes."

Constance said, "I want you to climb to the very top and then I want you to fly down. Do you understand?"

Romick replied, "Yes," and started walking in that direction.

Constance turned her attention to Lois, "Now, for you, Miss Lane, a death defying stunt. Over here, please." Constance led her to a giant Plexiglas tank with heavy locks and chains on it, and commanded, "Climb in."

Lois complied by climbing down a ladder into the chamber.

Turning to Superman once again, she said, "Superman, close the lid, lock the chains, and turn on the water."

Superman did as he was told, but Constance didn't notice that the water was not flowing in at full force because she was distracted by Romick.

Turning back to Superman she said, "Now, wave goodbye."

Superman waved to Lois.

Lois waved back.

Addressing Superman, Constance said, "It's time to send the world a message." Constance pulled out an electronic module with the Magic Channel logo emblazoned on it. "Superman, you will have the honor of activating my satellite. The Magic channel. A twenty-four hour cable channel, feeding into homes all around the world. And along with the entertainment, they'll receive my subliminal signals at no extra charge. Anyone who watches will be at my complete disposal. Now, go. It's already in orbit. All you have to do is install this final module and throw the broadcast switch."

Superman accepted the module and strode out.

Constance looked around and saw that Nick was in the sword box, that Romick was climbing the steps and that Lois was locked into the chamber with water flowing in. She noticed how slowly the water was flowing, but didn't think much of it.

She sauntered off.

When Superman had left, he hadn't gone very far, just out of the building. He had turned back and kept an eye on things by using his x-ray vision. Things were at a critical stage and he needed to be careful.

Once Constance walked off he zipped back into the building. His first stop was the top of the water chamber. He turned off the water and unlocked the hatch. After lowering the ladder into the chamber he commanded Lois, "Climb the ladder." When she didn't move he tried to imitate Constance's voice and said, "The moon and stars say to climb the ladder."

Lois immediately obeyed and climbed out of the chamber. Once out, Clark, again imitating Constance's voice said, "The moon and stars command you to forget that you have to obey those commands. When I count down from five and snap my

fingers you will awake refreshed and forget the post-hypnotic commands and remember what happened to you. Five ... four ... three ... two ... one." (snap)

Lois shook her head as if coming out of a dream. She could feel that her legs were wet and looked down and then around, at her surroundings. In a bewildered tone she asked, "How did I get here? How did I get wet? I was in a chamber ..."

Superman said, "I'll explain later. I need to save Romick." He flew off to intercept Romick.

Romick had made it two thirds of the way to the top when Superman grabbed him and flew him back to the floor.

When he set Romick back on his feet he again imitated Constance's voice and said, "The moon and stars command you to forget that you have to obey those commands. When I count down from five and snap my fingers you will awake refreshed and forget the post-hypnotic commands and remember what happened to you. Five ... four ... three ... two ... one." (snap)

Romick shook his head as if trying to regain his bearings. He said, "I remember now. Dr. Novak ..."

Superman put his hand on Romick's shoulder and said, "Don't worry about Dr. Novak."

"But ... but she ... she ordered me to kill him."

"Mr. Romick, is it in your nature to kill someone?"

"Well, no, I don't think so. I've never killed anyone. I wouldn't have believed that I could."

Superman replied, "Trust me, you didn't."

Superman flew to the top of the Plexiglas tank and picking up Lois flew her back down to the floor. He moved over to the sword box and released Nicky. Opening the lid he carried him over and set him on the floor next to Lois.

Kneeling in front of Nick he again imitated Constance's voice and said, "The moon and stars command you to forget that you have to obey those commands. When I count down from five and snap my fingers you will awake refreshed and forget the post-hypnotic commands and remember what happened to you. Five ... four ... three ... two ... one." (snap)

Nick shook his head and looked around. Seeing Superman he said, "Wow," and seeing Lois asked, "Who are you?"

Lois said, "I'm here to take you back to your mom," when she reached for his hand he placed it in hers and smiled.

Suddenly, from the side they heard, "The moon and the stars tell you to obey my voice."

Lois, Nick and Romick all stopped dead in their tracks and Superman was concerned that they were still going to obey her, but they had only stopped because they were surprised at hearing her voice.

Superman said to Lois, "Take Nicky out of here."

She nodded and leading Nick by the hand headed for the stage door.

Romick moved up next to Superman.

Suddenly, Constance appeared before them. She said, "You won't win, Superman. But things aren't always what they seem."

Superman cocked his head to one side. The voice was coming from a spot other than where Constance appeared to be, but he was having a hard time locating the actual source.

Turning to Romick he said, "Dr. Novak is in your magic box, pretending to be dead. Go help him out and go for the police."

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Lois took Nick out through the door and said, "Nick, I want you to wait right here. Don't go anywhere. I have to go back in and help Superman, but I want you to stay safe, okay?"

"Okay, I'll wait right here."

Lois patted him on the head and passed back in through the door.

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In order to test his theory, Superman headed for the image of Constance. It looked very real, but when he reached out to touch

her, she disappeared and he felt the cool surface of a mirror. He muttered, “Smoke and mirrors. The magician’s tools.” Stepping around the mirror, Superman found himself in a hall of mirrors with reflections of himself and Constance everywhere.

Suddenly, he heard Constance again, mocking him, “You may have Super vision, but all it takes is a split second to be fooled.”

He thought that he had finally zeroed in on the sound of her voice and thought it was behind him. He whipped around to find another reflection. The obvious conclusion was that her voice was bouncing off of the flat surfaces the same way her image was bouncing off the mirrors. He tried to look through the mirrors with his x-ray vision, but the mirrors interfered with that also. The obvious conclusion was that there was lead in the mirror coating.

He tried to ferret her out, “It’s over, Constance, your satellite, the Magic Channel, everything. I destroyed that electronic module.”

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Lois passed Romick and Dr. Novak as she was going back in. She said, “Take Nick with you. Get him to safety.”

Romick stopped and asked, “Where are you going?”

“I’m going back in to help Superman.”

Romick gave her a disbelieving look and said, “Do you really think that’s a good idea? She’s dangerous.”

With an arched eyebrow, Lois said, “I’m not exactly a defenseless woman. I can take care of myself.”

Romick shrugged his shoulders and said, “It’s your funeral.” He turned and with Dr. Novak following left the building.

As Lois reentered, she heard as Constance replied to Superman’s sally about the satellite, “Perhaps, but I’m still the world’s greatest magician.”

Disbelief in his voice, Superman asked, “You? A magician? There is no such thing as magic. It’s all illusion.”

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Following the voices, Lois had returned to where the earlier confrontation had occurred and started looking around. Suddenly as she moved slightly she was confronted by ... herself. Lois didn’t realize it was herself because of the semi-darkness and she was startled until she saw it was her own reflection and moved to investigate. As she moved around behind the mirror she found herself in the hall of mirrors and she heard Superman and Constance speaking. She started moving around looking for them.

Constance was spouting, “Darren Romick was a penniless card hustler when I found him. I taught him everything. Everything my father taught me.”

Lois had been moving toward the voices when suddenly a hand grabbed her and pulled her off balance. When she regained her footing, she felt a gun pressed into her temple.

Seconds later, Superman saw an image appear in the mirror in front of him. The image was of Constance holding Lois with a gun to her temple.

Seeing this threat, Superman reacted instantly by directing a blast of heat vision at the gun, but since he had used a high level beam it was only to see cracks appear in the mirror that held the image.

Lois shouted, “Superman!”

Constance continued her rant, “No one wanted to see a female illusionist. They didn’t take me seriously. So I got myself a front man who started to believe in his own success.”

Constance and Lois were constantly moving. Disappearing from one mirror and appearing in another. Superman needed them to stay put for at least a few seconds.

Lois knew that she needed to provide a distraction so that Superman could deal with the situation. She quipped, “All this just because nobody wanted to see you pull a rabbit out of your hat?”

Constance kept dragging Lois around as she replied, “It was a secret society that wouldn’t let me in. Now I’m going to show them all what true illusion really is.”

Superman knew that Lois was trying to help and played along, “You had a great talent, Constance. But you’re the one who wasted it by using it for revenge.”

Constance was at a place that she could see Superman’s reflection and he was looking all around, apparently confused. She paused to gloat and when she did she gave him the opening he was looking for. He used his heat vision, at a lower intensity, the same way he used it to cut his hair. He bounced it off of the mirrors hitting the gun in her hand.

As the gun heated Constance screamed and Lois took the opportunity to act. She windmilled her arm bringing it up under Constance’s, overhead and around back trapping Constance’s arm across her back and in the crook of her elbow. Then Lois’s other fist came up and clipped Constance under the chin.

Constance dropped unconscious to the floor as Lois released her arm.

Hearing Constance’s fall, Superman finally located them. He carried Constance’s unconscious form and led Lois out of the maze.

Once out of the hall of mirrors, Superman used some of the rope from the magic props to tie Constance up.

When she regained consciousness she asked, “How?”

He replied, “I’ve been onto you since the ransom pickup when you tried to hypnotize me. You failed, but I didn’t know what you had done to Nick. You could have drugged him for all I knew and I couldn’t take a chance that he would suffer ill effects if I took him away so I had to play along. You forgot a fundamental tenet of hypnotism. You cannot make someone do anything that they would not normally do even when hypnotized.”

“But you destroyed all of those parking meters.”

“It was supposed to look that way. You see, the city was preparing to replace those meters. They were outdated and a lot of them were malfunctioning. The Superman foundation contacted the city and volunteered Superman’s services to remove those meters. It saved the city some money and man-hours removing them. Ms. Lane didn’t know any differently and wrote up the story as she saw it.”

“Romick killed Novak.”

“No, actually, as you said, not everything is as it appears. I have been watching all day and saw what was happening. I used one of your own tricks against you. I used a mirror to fool Romick into thinking Dr. Novak was where he wasn’t. Then Dr. Novak played dead. He and Romick have gone for the police. They should be here shortly.”

“It won’t do any good. Neither of them will remember what happened. They all will forget the same as Lois and Nick will.”

“Again, you weren’t careful enough. I was able to imitate your voice even though that probably wasn’t necessary and broke your post-hypnotic suggestions. It was delivered through subliminal suggestion which didn’t affect me. Also we have your complete confession.”

“What? How?”

Reaching behind him, Superman grabbed his cape and reached into a secret pocket. He pulled out a miniature recorder and said, “I borrowed this from Clark Kent before I came here this evening. Every word has been recorded.”

Constance was practically frothing at the mouth with anger.

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## Chapter 8

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When the police arrived because he seemed to be most comfortable with Lois, arrangements were made for Lois to take custody of Nick so that she could see to it that he was reunited

with his mother.

When Superman was leaving, Nick watched and waved while holding Lois's hand. A few minutes later, Clark strolled up and Lois introduced Nick to him.

Lois and Clark took Nick to the Planet so that Lois could interview him and while she did that Clark called the Moskale residence and asked for Rose.

"Rose, this is Clark Kent. I realize that it is late ..."

He was interrupted by an anxious Rose, "Have you heard something? Something about, Nicky?"

Clark chuckled and said, "Well, as a matter of fact, he's here with me and my wife. If you want to come in to the Planet, I'm sure he'd be very happy to see you."

The relief was evident in her voice as she said, "The Daily Planet! I'll be there shortly."

"Take your time. He isn't going to disappear again, I assure you. We'll keep a close eye on him."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. I don't need to get a ticket. I'll be there shortly."

When she arrived at the Daily Planet, she was greeted downstairs by members of the MPD and escorted to the newsroom. When she stepped out of the elevator the worried look that had been on her face disappeared when she saw Nick at Jimmy's desk playing a computer game with Clark sitting next to him.

Nick heard the chime of the elevator and after making a move looked around. When he spotted her he shouted, "Mom," jumped up and ran to her.

Lois was nearby and Clark had followed Nick when he left the game. Coming up next to Lois, Clark put an arm around her and they both smiled as Rose and Nick were reunited.

After a few seconds, Rose looked up and asked, "How can I ever thank you?"

Nodding at Nick, Clark said, "You've got a pretty tough little boy there."

Lois pulled Rose aside and said, "He's going to remember what happened. I don't think he was mistreated, but just be aware."

While Lois had been talking to Rose, Clark had spoken to Nick, "You take care of your mom, okay?"

"Okay. Will you thank Superman for me?"

"I sure will."

Overhearing this, Rose said, "Can you thank Superman for me, too?"

Smiling, Clark said, "We'll make sure he gets the message."

Rose, hand-in-hand with Nick, headed for the elevator where the MPD officers had been waiting to escort them back to Rose's car.

As they were leaving, Lois and Clark saw Cat arriving.

Seeing that Cat was back in her normal, 'Cat', attire, short, low-cut and skin-tight, Lois asked, "What happened? Salvation Army turn you away?"

Dejectedly, Cat said, "He married an exotic dancer."

Stunned, Clark blurted out, "Arthur Chow?"

Cat said, "All that itchy, high-necked wool and he marries a woman who can wave hello with her navel."

Lois quipped, "That's too bad. I had your wedding present all picked out."

Cat's interest was piqued. She asked, "You did?"

Lois dropped her bomb, "A set of personalized stationery. 'From the desk of Cat Chow.'"

Not very amused, Cat glared at Lois and slunk away.

As Cat was leaving, Jimmy and Perry approached. They were in the midst of a conversation, "So that's it. Thanks to that tape that Superman made we know that all this strange behavior exhibited by famous people all over the world was linked to Constance. My angle: 'Great Minds Sink Alike.'"

Perry surprised him by double pointing and saying, "That's brilliant, Olsen," and slapping him on the back.

Jimmy's conscience had apparently been bothering him and he finally burst out, "All right, that's it. I can't take it anymore. I get it now. I've learned my lesson. False praise means nothing. If you don't think it's a good idea just \*say\* so."

Perry was puzzled and asked, "What in Sam Hill is he talkin' about?"

Clark smiled and pulling Jimmy aside said, "He means it, Jimmy."

Jimmy gave Clark a look, "You're just saying that."

Clark smiled and said, "Think about it. You didn't say 'Chief.'"

Jimmy looked to Perry and asked, "You mean it?"

Smugly, Perry replied, "Perry While \*never\* says anything he doesn't mean." Turning on his heel Perry headed for his office.

Jimmy looked at Clark with a question in his eyes.

Clark put him out of his misery. He said, "While you and Lois went to see Constance, I had Dr. Novak here to hypnotize the kids."

Jimmy started to smile as he saw where this was going.

"While he was here, I had him ... de-program Perry."

Jimmy smiled even more broadly and said, "Way to go, CK! Thanks."

When Jimmy headed for his desk, Clark turned to Lois and asked, "So. Do you still hate magic?"

Lois gave him a skeptical look and said, "A trick's a trick, no matter how big or how small. Once you figure it out it's not magic anymore."

Lois sat down at her desk and Clark sat on the edge and asked, "There's no magic anywhere? Not even a little?"

Lois simply said, "No."

With a smile, Clark said, "Oh. Let's see. Close your eyes."

Lois asked, "Why?"

He encouraged her, "Just do it."

She released a sigh of frustration, but she did close her eyes.

Once they were closed, Clark said, "Okay, now count to three."

As soon as he finished saying that he started moving faster than the eye could follow.

She counted, slowly, "One ... two ... three," and opened her eyes. When she did she was looking at Clark and he didn't appear to have moved. She asked, "Okay? What happened?"

He glanced at her desk and she followed his eyes. When she did she gasped and stared at the beautiful bouquet of roses that had been placed on her desk. She picked them up and smiled. Lifting them to her nose she sniffed their fragrant bouquet and said, "You never cease to amaze me, farmboy."

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A few seconds earlier, the florist at a booth just up the street from the Planet turned around from a counter at the back of the stall where he had been arranging flowers to find a gap in his display and some bills there in place of the flowers. Shaking his head he moved to the register and rang up the sale.

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Glancing at the clock, Lois picked up her bouquet and said, "I think we've had a long enough day. Let's get out of here. I still need to thank you for saving me from Constance, properly." She arched an eyebrow at him, before she continued, "Then I think you promised to teach me how to stir-fry tonight. After that, there's a movie I want to watch. You know which one. That new Mel Gibson one. Lots of shooting and bombs, that kind of thing." Linking her arm in his they strolled toward the elevator.

When they arrived at the apartment, Clark spun into a pair of jeans and a tight black T-shirt and went to the kitchen to start getting ready to cook while Lois went to the bedroom to change.

When she came out she was wearing one of his button down

oxford shirts with her legs bare. The shirt was unbuttoned to her waist and gaped open to expose her cleavage as she moved. She was rolling up the sleeves as she walked to the kitchen, her bare feet making gentle slapping noises as she walked on the tile floor.

“Lo — is. How can I concentrate on cooking when you are dressed like that?”

“Well, I really needed to get out of those hose and shoes; the skirt was still a little damp as well. Why did you let me get into that chamber, anyway? Couldn’t you have stopped Constance earlier?”

“There were a couple of problems. If I had shown her that I was not under her control there’s no telling what she would have done. I still wasn’t sure that she hadn’t used drugs. That was finally cleared up when she gave Romick her orders. The problem was that at that point I still didn’t know what her ultimate goal was and that didn’t come out until she gave me that satellite module. That’s when she explained her objective. By then you were already in the tank.”

Lois closed the distance between them and placed her hand on his bicep, stroking it slowly and looking into his eyes as he talked.

“Actually, you were safer there than outside. Plexiglas is pretty bulletproof so you were out of harm’s way. Romick was climbing up the ladder. A lot of people don’t realize that shooting uphill is more difficult than shooting straight ahead so the higher he went the safer he was. Nicky was in the sword box and with the sides up he couldn’t be seen making him a more difficult target as well. I needed to give her enough rope to hang herself so I kept her thinking I was under her influence as long as she kept talking.”

“Yeah, in the meantime, I was getting wet.”

“I knew I’d be able to get you out before there was a problem. If she hadn’t fooled me with those mirrors I’d have captured her earlier.”

“Did I thank you for making her drop that gun?”

“You don’t need to thank me, Lois.”

“Oh, but I want to.” She asked, “Did you know that I am now a magician?”

With an arched eyebrow he said, “Oh, I thought you hated magic.”

“I’ve had second thoughts. You showed me some magic ... making those roses appear from out of thin air. Now it’s my turn.” Lois lifted her arms and turning her hands back and forth said, “Observe, nothing in my hands.” She then pulled on the rolled up sleeves and said, “Nothing up my sleeves, except my arms, of course.” Then, reaching for the two buttons that were actually buttoned on the shirt she had on she started to unbutton them. With a sly grin, Lois said, “Now for my next trick ... I’ll make my clothes ... disappear.” On that final word she pulled the shirt open to reveal the fact that she was naked underneath and let the shirt slide off her arms to the floor.

Dinner preparations were forgotten and she giggled as he scooped her up at super speed and headed for the bedroom.

Once in the bedroom, Clark spun out of his clothes and joined her on the bed.

Clark moved so that he was looking down at her eye to eye. Slowly he lowered his face until their lips met in a gentle caress. The kiss quickly escalated as she swiped her tongue across his lower lip and opened her lips in invitation. Their tongues started to dance a slow tango.

That started a period of marital intimacy.

When they finished and Lois’s breathing had returned to normal, she said, “Wow! Remember Romick’s box?”

“Yeah, what about it?”

She smiled and said, “That was nothing compared to the moon and stars I just saw! Wow! That was something else!”

He looked deeply into her eyes, saw the fires of love there

and asked, “Were you doing this to say thanks?”

“No, I was doing this because I wanted to make love with my husband.”

“I thought you wanted another cooking lesson.”

“Oh, I do. Just not yet. We have all night for cooking.”

“What about the Mel Gibson movie?”

“What movie?”

“The movie you mentioned, the one with Mel Gibson.”

In a dreamy tone she replied, “All I can think of right now is you and what you we’re doing. Kiss me some more.” As she was speaking she was shifting her hips. “Besides, one of these days, we are going to try for twelve.”

He laughed and said, “You’re trying to kill me.”

“Love you to death, maybe.”

THE END